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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001790

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

NEW DELHI PLS PASS TO AMBASSADOR WILLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Peace process update: Report of tensions in military; Tiger cadre movement; Cricket's healing powers

Refs: Colombo 1787, and previous

(U) Classified by W. Lewis Amselem, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

11. (C/NF) This update of Sri Lanka's peace process reviews the following:

-- Reported tensions in military toward government's peace initiative

-- President muted in public re peace process

-- Largest Tamil Tiger cadre movement to date goes smoothly, according to monitors

-- The flavor of the peace process: Sri Lankans of all stripes embrace major international cricket tournament now taking place in Colombo

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Report of Tensions in Military
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12. (C/NF) Mission has picked up its first indication of possible tensions within the military toward the peace process. In a September 25 meeting with RSO, Nimal Goonetilleke, the head of the Police Special Task Force (STF) (please protect), related that he had heard that five or six high-ranking military officers (NFI) were actively speaking out against the peace process within their respective commands. Goonetilleke speculated that some of these officers might be angry because the peace process was beginning to undermine illicit activities they were engaged in. The GSL had heard of these murmurs, he continued, which was the genesis of public remarks the Prime Minister made September 21 to the effect that he would not tolerate "divided loyalties" within government ranks. When asked, Goonetilleke replied that he had no information that anyone in the military was planning to take any sort of action against the GSL.

13. (C/NF) Comment: Goonetilleke is usually a solid source, though we have not picked up collaborating information re his report. Given how fast the peace process has moved, it is not surprising that some in the military may be disillusioned, perhaps feeling that they are being abandoned after a valiant effort defending the country (or -- more cynically -- that they are losing out on their illicit perks gained by wartime exigencies). For its part, the government has tried to do its best to ensure that the military remains on board by keeping it fully briefed on the peace process and by maintaining benefits to the extent the GSL's difficult financial circumstances allow. End Comment.

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President Muted re Peace Process
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14. (C) President Kumaratunga has taken a muffled public approach re the peace process in the aftermath of the successful conclusion of the recent talks in Thailand. In general, her relatively few public comments re the talks have basically struck positive tones. According to contacts, however, one matter that appears to have gotten under the President's skin is that no one in the government has offered to personally brief her on the results of the talks. (Note: Harim Peiris, a presidential spokesman, told us late September 26 that he had heard that the government might be trying to arrange some sort of briefing, but he had no confirmation.)

15. (SBU) (((Note: Kumaratunga's general lack of public comment on the peace process contrasts with a series of recent speeches she has given re domestic issues. In these speeches, usually given before cheering party members, she has harshly lashed out at the GSL re its

plans to move forward with a bill that would amend the executive's powers to call new elections. In one widely reported speech on this issue, Kumaratunga was quoted as stating, "They are trying to clip the wings of the president. I will use my powers. I will not die like a kitten.")))

16. (C) Comment: Kumaratunga has been alternately hot-and-cold re this iteration of the peace process since its inception. At times, she has vociferously criticized the government's handling of the issue. At other times, she has assumed an almost proprietary air by underscoring the fact that the current process has roots in moves she took when she first came to power in 1994-95. The fact that she is relatively muted on the subject now may indicate that she just does not see making much political mileage by commenting on the peace process at this point. Reports that she has not yet been offered a briefing re the Thai talks are disturbing, as it is the sort of slight that only increases "cohabitation" tensions. End Comment.

Large LTTE Cadre Movement goes smoothly

17. (SBU) Under the auspices of the February ceasefire accord, the LTTE has made a major troop movement. Pierre Elderson, a Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) official, has confirmed that 265 LTTE cadre went by vehicle from Batticaloa in the east to Omanthai, a LTTE-controlled border town in the north-central part of the country on September 23. The movement was monitored by SLMM observers and tracked by the Sri Lankan military. Elderson reported that the movement went smoothly with no problems reported. He added that 210 of the cadre were female and 55 male. Originally slated to be a sea movement, bad weather offshore necessitated that it be by land.

18. (SBU) Comment: There have been a number of cadre movements so far, but this is the largest to date. The fact that it went so smoothly is a testament to how well the ceasefire accord and related GSL-LTTE understandings are being implemented. The SLMM showed great skill in arranging the movement, which we understand took hours of laborious mediation. End Comment.

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Cricket's Healing Powers
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19. (U) Sri Lankans are avidly embracing a major international cricket tourney now taking place in Colombo. The three-week tournament sponsored by the International Cricket Council is the second most important in cricket, ranking just after the World Cup. All of the best international cricket teams have been participating, including Australia, India, Pakistan, and the popular local team. Large crowds have flocked to the matches and the TV audience, including in the war-ravaged north and east, is said to be huge. The fact that the Sri Lankan team has done quite well has also helped ratings, no doubt. The country is expected to come to a standstill when Sri Lanka plays defending world champion Australia on September 27.

110. (SBU) Comment: The fact that a major cricket tournament is taking place in Sri Lanka at all is a pleasant surprise to many here. Sri Lankans had grown used to their cricket-mad country being overlooked as a host for major events because of the conflict and the danger of terrorism. Big events can now take place in Sri Lanka due to the peace process, however, and Sri Lankans of all ethnic stripes appreciate that. Indeed, for Sri Lankans the news only gets better: a major test match between the Australian and Pakistani teams had to be moved from Pakistan because of tensions there. The new site: Sri Lanka. End Comment.

11. (U) Minimize considered.
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